

MLA Task Force on Doctoral Study in Modern Language and Literature
2013 MLA Convention
Session 394. Reforming Doctoral Study
4 January, 5:15–6:30 p.m., Back Bay D, Sheraton

Facing profound changes in higher education, rapid technological developments, new expectations about student learning, and the shifting character of the academic workforce, we need to rethink and pose questions about the future of doctoral education in language and literature.

The Instructional Program

- How might we shift the curriculum away from a historical-coverage model toward a building-skills-and-fundamental-capacities model—that is, one that encompasses the ability to carry out extended research, work in multimodal environments, engage in interpretation, think historically, or pursue the public humanities?
- How might the teaching experience of graduate students be reshaped as preparation for careers as change agents who promote learning processes, even outside the education sector?
- How might we remap doctoral programs to go beyond traditional departmental faculty members to include other members of the university community and to build collaborations with other institutions?
- What efficient constellations of curricula and examinations can emerge?

The New Dissertation

- What is distinctive about the dissertation in humanities doctoral education?
- What is being mastered in completing the dissertation?
- In what ways is the dissertation expected to be scholarly? In other words, what do we mean now by *scholarly*? What do we mean by *expertise*?
- What forms might the scholarly in scholarly communication take? How does the new ecology of scholarly communication affect the concept of the dissertation?
- How might the dissertation be positioned differently in the context of other components of graduate education?
- What impact might expanding the kinds and forms of dissertations have on the disciplines of the humanities and the possible futures of doctoral students?

Alternative Paths for Scholars of Languages and Literature

- How might doctoral programs change in the light of the fact that many students will work outside the tenure track and even beyond what are conventionally recognized as academic careers?
- How do we revalue alternative career paths and redesign programs to prepare students to pursue them as a strategy to sustain and transform the humanities?
- How might we shift the conception of doctoral education as serving primarily for the replication of faculty to embrace the changes implied by a broadened understanding of placement?
- What opportunities and challenges do we face in providing students with rich extracurricular training and internship experiences?
- How might we build teaching partnerships among traditional faculty members and the many humanities scholars working in “alternative academic” careers?